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SUBJECT: NOTES FROM JORDAN'S PARLIAMENT: ALLIANCES WAX AND
WANE, ISLAMISTS REJECT PRIVILEGES

REF: AMMAN 2941

Classified By: DCM Lawrence Mandel
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Two weeks after the allocation of parliamentary committee chairmanships and leadership positions, the alliance between parliament speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali's National Democratic Trend and the business-oriented National Fraternal Bloc (Al-Ikha) was dissolved. A new bloc of MPs who were shut out of leadership positions is starting to flex its muscles. Islamist deputies announced that they would forego perks given to MPs, a move journalists are hailing and fellow parliamentarians call cheap populism. End Summary.

Coalition? What Coalition?

¶2. (C) The parliamentary alliance between speaker Majali's National Democratic Trend (NDT) and the younger, business-oriented National Fraternal Bloc (Al-Ikha) ended with little fanfare on October 29. A statement issued by the Ikha made it clear that elevation of its members to committee chairmanships and other leadership positions had been the only reason for an alliance with the NDT -- now that the Ikha was allotted those positions, there was no longer need for the coalition (Ref A). Contacts both inside and outside of parliament portrayed the alliance's collapse as politics as usual. "It's all about leadership positions and personal gain," one NGO leader told us. Ikha MPs Mubarak Abbadi and Mohammed Al-Shra'a told poloff that unlike the NDT, their bloc had "real ideas" and was therefore unwilling to attach itself to Majali's personality-based group.

New Bloc Flexes Its Muscles By Staging Walkout

¶3. (U) Following their defeat in parliament's leadership elections, nominally leftist deputies have banded together in an attempt to retain some influence in the parliamentary decision-making process. Five deputies, led by former Amman Mayor Mamdouh Al-Abbadi, declared their intention to form a new parliamentary bloc on November 10. In a show of defiance, members of the new bloc effectively torpedoed the November 12 session of parliament by staging a walkout. Abbadi and others loitered in the hallway outside of the chamber but refused to enter, a move designed to show that Majali and his allies cannot run the parliament by refusing to share the spoils of power. Press commentary has severely criticized the move, seeing it as further proof that MPs are concerned more with prestige positions than policy issues.

New IAF Populist Appeal

¶4. (C) During the week of October 26, deputies from the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamic Action Front declared that they would forego some perks accorded to MPs out of solidarity with ordinary people in tough economic times.

Parliamentarians are allowed to import cars with more powerful engines such as SUVs and sports cars without paying the normal hefty tax. Similarly, while ordinary Jordanians must wait until age 65 to apply for a visa to travel to Mecca on the Hajj, MPs can claim a Hajj visa allotted to Jordan by the Saudi authorities. Former Muslim Brotherhood member and current columnist at pro-reform newspaper Al-Ghad Mohammed Abu Rumman hailed the move, saying that it "improved (the IAF's) credibility." Fellow Al-Ghad columnist Samih Al-Ma'ayitah called the failure of other MPs to follow the IAF's move a "political mistake" that voters would not forget. Other MPs, who did not follow the IAF's example, told us the move was cheap populism, claiming that it would not win over a single voter.

Beecroft